

Nov. 22, '76

Dear Helen,

When I read about your feelings while you prepare for leaving Thailand I recognize so much myself. When I had to leave Thailand I cried and thought: 'This is the end'. Sarah had the same feelings when she left Sri Lanka and returned home. Sarah, Jenni and I talked at length about all our experiences. I would like to think of some consoling things to tell you, because I would rather that all my friends leave Thailand happily.

You have received the foundation and now it is good to be your own refuge, and that means Dhamma is your refuge. But sure, we are glad to be able to meet Dhamma, friends from time to time, and as you say, in Australia there are many people now who are interested in the Dhamma. But I really understand that you wonder how it will be with you in the future; you think you have less reminders for sati and less conditions for panna to arise when not in Thailand. You think you should not lose any moment and listen to the Dhamma as much as you can, since death-consciousness can arise even tonight.

I used to think like that, but now I don't think so anymore. Reminders are so good and we all need them, but I feel I do not have to be in Thailand for that all the time. I can make my own reminders, and the people I meet are my reminders, and the newspapers are sometimes my reminders. For example a little girl in the Italian village which was struck by poison-gas. She was photographed before the calamity and four months after and how the rupas had changed completely. And all the cases of death among my friends can be reminders. And when we have Dhamma conversations with friends we meet outside Thailand, we have plenty of reminders. And these conversations you can tape and so you make your own tapes. Moreover, you bring your tapes from Thailand and thus you can continue to listen. And what a happy occasion when we can visit Thailand again later on. Then we are able to appreciate even more what we hear, because our understanding has grown a tiny bit. We are more open-minded and sincere with ourselves, and thus we can take in more.

Everything which is good we can twist and exaggerate so that it is not the middle way, I find more and more. Such as: listening to the Dhamma. It is excellent in itself, we sure need it. But, desire is bound to come in and we might think that there is more sati while we listen than at other times, when we laugh, shop, or go to the beauty-parlor. When we do not think of sati, sati arises. When we think of sati, sati does not arise. This has to do with desire and taking thinking of sati for sati, I find. You may wonder then how a reminder can work. This is hard to tell. At the time of the reminder there may be no sati, but later on it can be remembered and sati may arise. But it arises also when there isn't any outward reminder, it 'remembers' to arise, sometimes.

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While we are in the group in Thailand, it feels so secure, but this can have disadvantages. Don't we attach to familiar faces and voices and don't we copy, unknowingly, in the way we explain Dhamma for example, those we admire? When we are on our own we become more independant and the way we speak about the Dhamma can be more our own way instead of copying what we heard. And this is more useful to others who listen. There can be a lot of clinging in our wanting to listen and listen and not lose one minute. Who can tell about sati? Sati may not arise when listening, but it may arise at other times.

You ask me whether I have a wish sometimes to become an arahat and whether the wish to become one is kusala or not. I think it is bound to be desire most of the time, since there are many more akusala cittas than kusala cittas. Arahat, that is so far beyond my scope, I do not think of it. But sometimes there may be desire to become sotāpanna, since I would not have an unhappy rebirth and I am still afraid for an unhappy rebirth. And then I realise that this is only a kind of thinking and that through thinking one cannot achieve anything at all, that it is completely useless. As you say, nobody can control his patisandhi-citta of the next life. But certainly, such thinking can come up. I do not take it so seriously and I realise that the more ordinary my life is, the better for sati.

You have lived so long as a mechi, and lived near the temple and therefore I think that the transition to life in Australia may be even greater than it was for me, who always had a busy life, also when in Bangkok, going to parties, etc. Will you take a job when you are home and are you going to be near relatives? Do not expect them to be interested in the Dhamma, if you do not expect anything, it won't be so bad. You also should think of a kind of transition period, while still in Bangkok. Khun Ursula told me a beautiful story of Khun Sujin taking her to a beauty parlor. She said: Khun Sujin also wants her to look after the rupas. You may not like this idea, but later on saññā remembers and then it will have a lot of meaning to you. Like Khun Sujin's shopping in India. Won't you go shopping with Khun Sujin? Or have lunch with her in Khun Kulin's beautiful restaurant. Then you see Khun Kulin at work. She has not much time to listen to the Dhamma, but there is sati arising so naturally, she is in no way forcing it. We can learn from others while we see them and we do not even have to talk much. I think you should not feel guilty about having a good time. I heard from different people that they feel guilty when they have lobha. The aim now is not to remove lobha, we cannot anyway, but to know realities more. The more 'natural' we live, the better for sati. I hope your last months can be a preparation for your leaving in this way and later on it will help you. You could check the following: lose some moments of listening to the Dhamma, and see whether sati is any different while you do other things. But all

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the work you do is wonderful, helping with copying and so on. When you have left I am sure there will still be similar things for you to do and you can start correspondance, telling others about your experiences while at home. When do you leave?

Please talk it over with Khun Sujin and ask her whether she can think of some relaxing things like shopping for you, in order to lead a more worldly life too, with awareness. I would love to hear from you about this, Khun Ursula can help you too, she is marvellous. I had such a good time with her when she was in Europe. We combined trips with Dhamma talks, so naturally.

Since I heard from people feeling guilty about attachment, I am more cautious now to tell them that detachment is so good. It is the final aim, and attachment makes us unhappy, but the first aim is to know realities as they are, also attachment. And when I was giving a lecture I found I had to repeat this and people just could not understand this point. And still we should try to explain it right in the beginning, otherwise people get all wrong ideas about Buddhism.

I have confidence that when we need it most to return to Bangkok there will be conditions for it, it works out that way. Kusala kamma is so powerful and we do not have to worry at all. For the same reason we do not have to worry how we will die. Remember the Phagguna sutta?

Another suggestion: Can you pass Indonesia on your way home? There are so many centers now and I think you can do good work over there. If you want to, I can ask some addresses to the Indonesian monk who is here. Write me some more, how you are getting on and I will think of some more suggestions for you, hoping that they can help you to lead a 'worldly life' with sati. We think of kusala, all kinds, and if sati arises, it's good, but we do not try or expect so much. You write: paññā is so weak and so it is. We have to accept that, it is due to our accumulations of ignorance. Count your blessings, all you have learnt, the foundation is there.

With warmest wishes,

Nina.